

Spotlight on Newark, New Jersey

by Michael Pustorino

Newark is the largest city in the state of New Jersey with a population estimated at 278,154 in 2009. According to the 2000 census, the city was 53% African American or Black and 27% White. Almost 30% of the population is Hispanic, who can be of either race. Among Latinos, Puerto Ricans are the largest group. They are U.S. citizens, speak English, and share communities with African Americans in North Newark. There is also a significant Portuguese speaking Brazilian population (Ramos-Zayas, 2007).

The movement of African Americans into Newark started between 1910 and 1930 during the Great Migration when jobs in manufacturing were available in Newark. It was fueled by the desire of Southern Blacks to escape racism and seek employment opportunities in industrial cities. Puerto Ricans migrated to Newark during 1950s and 1960s largely for economic reasons (Ramos-Zayas, 2007).

Brazilians overwhelmingly live in the Ironbound district of Newark, a predominately Portuguese neighborhood located in the East Ward. They came to the U.S. following a period of military dictatorship and a *década perdida*, or “lost decade”, in the 1980s and 1990s, with high inflation rates and unemployment (Ramos-Zayas, 2007).

Newark is located approximately five miles west of Manhattan. Its location near the Atlantic Ocean on Newark Bay has helped make its port facility, Port Newark, the major container shipping port for New York Harbor. In 2003, the Port moved over \$100 billion in goods. Plans are underway for larger cranes, bigger rail yard facilities, deeper channels, and expanded wharves. Newark is also the third-largest insurance center in the U.S. Prudential Financial, one of the largest insurance companies in the world, is headquartered in Newark. Newark is the home of the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), Rutgers University - Newark, Seton Hall University School of Law, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (Newark Campus), Essex County College, and a Berkeley College campus. Most of Newark’s academic institutions are located in the city’s University Heights district.

Newark has recently had an athletic “Renaissance.” Newark’s Prudential Center is home to the New Jersey Devils (hockey) and is the temporary home of the New Jersey Nets (men’s basketball) and the New York Liberty (women’s basketball). The Newark Bears are a top minor league baseball team and the New York Red Bulls (soccer) play in Harrison, a suburb adjacent to Newark.

In July 1967, rioting led to a bloody confrontation between primarily Black community residents and overwhelmingly White police and National Guard units. Twenty-six community residents were killed, 725 were injured, and 1,500 were arrested. Property damage exceeded \$10 million. Following the riots, Newark was stigmatized as a U.S. city in trouble overwhelmed by crime, poverty, and everything else associated with a city in ruin.

In 1970, Kenneth Gibson became Newark’s first Black mayor, as well as the first Black mayor of a major U.S. city. Gibson was a pragmatic campaigner, focusing only on the issues that dealt with quality of life in Newark, such as sanitation and police protection. He remained as mayor until defeated for reelection in 1986.

Poverty and crime remain problems in Newark, despite its economic revitalization in recent years and rebuilding of the downtown area. In 2003, the median income for a family was \$30,781. The official unemployment rate has consistently been over ten percent. In 1996, *Time Magazine* ranked Newark “The Most Dangerous City in the Nation.” However its 99 murders in 2007 represented a significant reduction from its high of 161 set in 1981. In March 2010, Newark enjoyed its first month without a homicide since 1966.

References

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newark,_New_Jersey; <http://www.simplyhired.com/a/local-jobs/city/l-Newark,+NJ>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1967_Newark_riots.
Ramos-Zayas, A. (2007). *Becoming American, Becoming Black? Urban Competency, Racialized Spaces, and the Politics of Citizenship Among Brazilian and Puerto Rican Youth in Newark.*